

Women's changing roles

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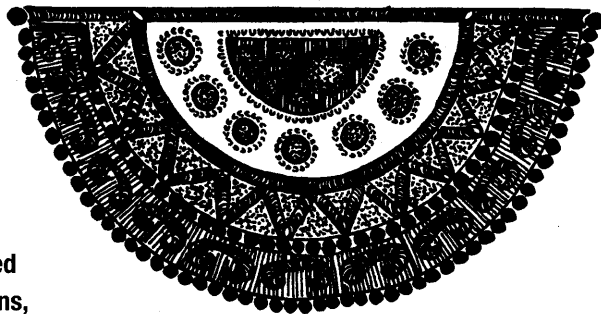
Though the articles in this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* focus mostly on the roles of women in the church, women's roles in the home, church, and society have been in transition for years. I'm a prime representative of women with very different understandings of the roles we can take on in life than those in past generations.

Let's take my grandmother for example. She wanted to be a schoolteacher. Instead, she had to quit school at age 13 to help out at home. Following "From the Editor," is a poem I wrote as part of a series on my grandparents. In it, I reflect upon her attendance at a Bible course at Eastern Mennonite School, now University, in order to grieve the loss of her aspirations so she could meet the expectations of her family and community.

By contrast, my parents not only encouraged me to attend college, they raised me with the flat-out assumption that I would. I now have a master's degree and a fulfilling career. Between my husband and I, I am the one who does the most traveling—business meetings or weekend trips to visit friends—with him left behind to care for the home. In addition, I don't feel solely responsible for the traditional female domestic roles. Though I do things out of necessity, I don't like to cook, wash dishes, or iron. These duties are shared between my husband and me. At the age of 34, I still do not feel a desire to become a mother. Nevertheless, I continue to feel very feminine. I must thank the many people who have fought for women's rights through the years for the fact that I see

I must thank the many people who have fought for women's rights through the years for the fact that I see all the roles I do in my life as female roles, whether they have been traditionally defined as such or not.





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whether they have been traditionally
defined as such or not.

But that's not the end of the story.
Women continue to have difficulty attain-
ing positions in any significant numbers
that have been traditionally held by men
and holding power or prestige in society.
Mary Swartley discusses the struggles that
women have had to be a part of the role
of interpreting Anabaptist history. It is not
only important for women to be accepted
for their gifts as historians, but also for
women's stories to be included so that full
history is told. As is reflected throughout
this issue, women still struggle to use
their gifts in the church as well. And
where inroads have been made, Kimberly
Schmidt astutely wonders, "Perhaps
female church leadership roles are less
an indication of how far we've come and
more of an indication of the church's low-

Debra Gingerich works as a com-
munications coordinator and is
the former editor of *Women's
Concerns Report*. She lives in
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with
her husband Zvonko and pet
cockatiel Sidni.

ered status in society. Perhaps men are
abandoning the church, and, in so doing,
leave the doors open for women."

For all women to be able to use their God-
given gifts freely, it is not only sexism we
must confront, but racism as well. As
Michelle Armster points out, the tradi-
tional egalitarian roles of women and men
in the Black Church were abandoned out
of the forced need to ascribe to white val-
ues in order to survive in American society.

So when asked how women's roles have
changed over the years, I must return to
an old adage: The more things change,
the more they remain the same. This is a
struggle as old as biblical times. In Luke
10:38-42, Martha wrestled with her
bondage to traditional roles. I do not
believe that Jesus encouraged Martha to
abandon those roles (especially if she was
gifted at them), but to look beyond them
as Mary was doing by sitting at Jesus' feet
to learn from him. We can all be encour-
aged by Martha's transformation, who is
the only person recorded, besides Peter,
to proclaim to Jesus that he is the Messiah
(John 11:27). Martha confesses, "Yes,
Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,
the Son of God, the one coming into the
world." If that is not an example of a
woman embracing her gift of preaching,
I don't know what is. And so we continue
to strive for the rest of society to embrace
all of the gifts given to women as well.

—compiled by Debra Gingerich

The MCC Committees on Women's Concerns believe that all women and men are made in God's image and called to do God's work. We strive to work for the dignity and self-development of Mennonite, Brethren-in-Christ and Mennonite Brethren women, and to encourage wholeness and mutuality in relationships between women and men.

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Since the inception of the Women's Concerns desks, the desks have advocated for women's increased role in broader society. Much of this issue is devoted to women's changing roles in the Church. Women are increasingly given opportunities to lead worship, lead Sunday morning singing, and to deliver the Sunday morning sermon. In the 30 years since the beginnings of the Women's Concerns desks, women in the Brethren in Christ church, Mennonite Brethren church, Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada have been pastoring churches (with or without ordination), and have been attending and graduating from seminary. The Bible affirms these roles. In the January-February 1980 issue of *Women's Concerns Report*, Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus listed these Biblical stories and verses in support of women's public leadership in churches:

Miriam was a prophet (Exodus 15:20). "I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead you" (Micah 6:4).

Deborah was a mother, a prophet, a judge of Israel, and a leader (Judges 4 and 5). She held powerful positions in her society.

Huldah was a prophet in the time of Jeremiah (II Kings 22:12-20).

Elizabeth and *Mary* spoke under the inspiration of the Spirit (Luke 1:41-45).

Women were the first persons to be commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the news of Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10).

Daughters, and sons, shall prophesy (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17).

Priscilla took the major role, with her husband, of instructing Apollas, who was a leader in the early Church (Acts 18:26).

The four unmarried *daughters* of Philip were prophets proclaiming God's message (Acts 21:9).

Phoebe was a servant of the Church (Romans 16:1), "who holds office in the congregation."

*Information about "center women" drawn from an article by Laurie L. Oswald, "Philadelphia women who are backbone of congregations share 'book' of their lives," May 21, 2003.

However, as women begin to take these new roles, they also continue to provide much of the background work of the church, or, as more aptly called, "center" work. Center women* organize behind the scenes, teach Sunday and Bible schools, host potlucks, decorate the sanctuary, visit the sick, and take food to those who have just gone through major life changes. These roles, which often take place in the basement of the church or in the homes of congregants, are just as important as the roles women fill in front of the congregants in the sanctuary. Without these center women, the church would fall apart.

—Patricia J. Haverstick

editor

From the Desk

- **30th Anniversary Celebration and Mug.** In 2003, we are celebrating 30 years of work by the MCC Women's Concerns Desks. At the *Gifts of the Red Tent; Women Creating* conference in May, there was a formal time of celebration with sharing from past, present, and future women leaders of the church. Reflections were shared by Dorothy Yoder Nyce and Luann Habecker Martin, co-founders and former chairs of the Committee for Women's Concerns; Peggy Unruh Regehr, former staff person for MCC Canada Women's Concerns; Katie Funk Wiebe, former member of the Committee for Women's Concerns, and Maribel Ramirez Hinojosa and Moniqua Acosta, current members of the United States Committee for Women's Concerns. At the conference, a mug commemorating the 30th anniversary of Women's Concerns was unveiled and offered for sale for the first time. There are a limited number of these attractive green and white mugs, which feature an illustration by Teresa Pankratz, still available. The mugs cost \$8 U.S. plus shipping. Please contact Patricia Haverstick, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns, at 717-859-1151 or tjh@mccus.org.
- **Gifts of the Red Tent; Women Creating.** The sixth "Women Doing Theology" conference planned by women in the United States and Canadian Anabaptist communities was held May 16-18, 2003 (the planning was coordinated out of the MCC U.S. Women's Concerns office). Major presentations were given by Malinda Berry, Reta Halteman Finger, and Iris de León Hartshorn. Malinda presented on the "Theology of Wonder," and explained that this "involves approaching our faith and beliefs in ways that allow us to be stirred by . . . astonishing and wondrous claims." Reta focused on the role of hospitality in the early church, and how the early church built community through a shared daily meal organized by women, and urged audience members to stretch their definition of hospitality. Iris discussed a "Theology of Wandering" by using the example of Hagar, enslaved by Abraham and Sarai, and drawing on Iris' own indigenous heritage. She said, "Wanderings are spiritual. Finding the places of rest, places to meet others along the way and having faith to see the possibilities are all part of the journey." A "dialogical response" and an artistic response were offered for each presentation. The "dialogical response" featured four women who discussed their insights and perspectives on what was shared. Also, workshops that celebrated the arts were offered on Saturday afternoon. The January-February 2004 issue of *Women's Concerns Report* will provide reflections and reports from the conference. (Kristine Sensenig, "Women share talents, theological insights under 'Red Tent,'" MCC News Service, May 30, 2003.)

Lewis County Chronicle 3

by Debra Gingerich

Marian didn't care if others thought it improper. She knew better than to let pass the chance to sit in the front row with the men, pretending she had completed high school, that her education hadn't ended at thirteen and she hadn't stayed home to carry sheared wool to the Indian River for washing, to cut meat out of the winter pigs, and rake corners of hay fields by hand. She forgot about the horseshit tracked in by the silent farmhands she cooked for, the complaints about homework from the lawyer's children she nannied, or her every third weekend off when she could attend youth group hymn sings. Instead, she thought of the days she had played "teacher" with her sister, the way the chalk tablet had rested in her hands, and how happy she was the times her father had allowed her to write the names of newborns in the family Bible, the extravagant curve of letters. What if this six-week Bible course was four years, and she'd return home with a gold-sealed degree to hang on the wall of a schoolhouse with an indoor restroom and furnace rumbling in the basement, instead of the hand-written certificate and opportunity to teach Bible to women or children on Sundays?



Mother and daughter: Beyond costumes and puzzlement

Virginia

I grew up in the late 1950s in a small rural, white church, the only Mennonite congregation within seventy miles. I attended services in that setting until I was 22, and then moved to an urban, multi-racial Mennonite church for a few years. For the past 31 years, I have lived in a white community with a large Mennonite population.

I have seen women's roles in the church through the lens of my nurturing, administrative and visionary gifts. Early on, a restrictive picture emerged for me. It was as if I were a boat owner standing on the shore watching an overwhelming number of people struggle in the water. However, as I prepared to untie my boat and actively help with rescue efforts, I heard a clear message to remain quiet and keep my boat tied because "Jesus appointed men to do that job and we don't know what to do with your gifts."

Over the years, the spoken and unspoken messages I have heard about hierarchy and the silencing of women led me to question why God gave me gifts in the areas of nurture, administration and vision. The desire to abide by church regulations without denying my calling created unhealthy tension within me.

I first experienced prescribed women's roles early in my pre-teens when I would naturally greet people after worship services and encourage the sick and the elderly. People appreciated my simple nurturing efforts and often acknowledged them with the words, "You should become a pastor's wife." This instilled in me a fear that I would not be able to use my gifts if I married a man who was not a pastor.

Throughout my Mennonite church experience, women have not been permitted to preach—except in the multi-racial Mennonite church that I attended for a short time. Women have also not chaired meetings or served on committees that help set the direction of the church. Additionally, the leadership that women exercise in their daily and professional lives has not been welcomed in the congregation. Neither has the church been a setting where they can clearly speak their views on scripture.

Fortunately, I am a woman of adventure and drama. I have been able to create acceptable costumes, as it were, to clothe my God-given gifts. I have joyfully worn this wardrobe as I have poured myself into the church in teaching Bible School, planning Junior Church, mentoring prayer groups, hosting times of worshipful ritual for small groups, initiating health ministry, and enabling the congregation to use drama and the arts in worship. In spite of needing to wear costumes, I am, indeed, grateful for these windows of opportunity to serve in the church.

However, as I contemplate my next steps, I am deeply saddened to realize that for 50 years I have expended so much time designing and wearing costumes to disguise my pastoring. I regret not having had the accountability and encouragement that come with having one's gift named. I find it unfortunate that women, who comprise 60 percent of the church, have been excluded this long when the need for pastors and leaders is so great.

May our Mennonite daughters find open space to articulate what God has called them to do. In the words of Joan Chittister, "The church needs to stop walking on one leg."

by Virginia Hartman and
Tina Hartman

Virginia (Ginny) Hartman lives in Elida, Ohio. She works as a nurse and plans to enroll in seminary. She delights in creating atmospheres, via drama, that invite persons to express themselves in ways that are more easily received than in other settings.

Tina Hartman is Virginia's daughter and lives in Akron, Pennsylvania. She works at Mennonite Central Committee U.S. and is a member of Blossom Hill Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

continued on page 6

Tina

When Mom and I were first asked to write this article, I thought it would be easy. I would simply take my mother's experience in the church and talk about the difference I see in my own. Indeed, I see the changes that the different generations have brought, but it is often not easy to see the changes without focusing on the hurts that the Church causes the women in my generation.

I grew up in the Mennonite community mentioned above. As a child, I began to notice that no woman ever preached a sermon on Sunday mornings, nor did a woman ever step up to the platform of our church unless there was a man already present on the platform. This was indeed a puzzle to me.

Women's roles in the church continued to be a mystery to me. I remember, as a teenager, wondering why women were allowed and actually encouraged to teach boys during the most formative years of children's lives, yet they were not allowed to teach adult men, even those they had

taught in childhood. I remember vividly when my best friend and I, the only teenage girls in the church, decided to run for co-presidents of our youth group. Our youth leader told us that there must be a boy present in the leadership of the youth group. Unlike my submissive personality of my teenage years, I remember my unvoiced challenge to him. I challenged him to find someone better than us for the job. With satisfaction, I watched as his search lead him back to us. Each boy he recommended for the job in turn recommended Michelle and me. I have often pointed back to that process as the time when I knew that I would work some day to effect change in the roles of women in the church.

Women's roles in the church of my childhood were the traditional service roles—teaching children's Sunday school, cooking and cleaning for potlucks, and sewing comforters to send to people in need. The women were the song leaders, at least when there was not a man to fill the position, and they were instrumental

Virginia: I am deeply saddened to realize that for 50 years I have expended so much time designing and wearing costumes to disguise my pastoring.



in teaching the songs of the church to their children. The women of my childhood church were the people who helped to nurture the future of the church. I have always thought of my mother and other women in her generation as the experts on spiritual direction in the church. The problem is that this role was never recognized.

I believe that this lack of recognition of roles in the church of my childhood has to do with the way we define the roles. If I were to describe the roles of women listed above as roles of service in the church, no one would argue. Men in the church of my youth would accept without question that these were the roles that women should play in the church. If I would describe these same roles as roles of leadership, ultimately shaping the decisions made in the church, I could only predict that reactions would be much more argumentative. The real problem in the church lies not in how the roles need to change, but in how the roles are perceived.

This, of course, is not to assume that we don't need a change of roles in the church. I have been blessed for the past two years to be a member of a congregation with a female pastor. I have seen God's presence

in her leadership of this church. I am a strong advocate of women's pastoral roles in the church. However, I am also an advocate of recognizing the powerful roles that women already play in the church.

Today I see the roles of women in the church very slightly changed from my childhood. They are still the servants of the church, and many still receive no recognition for the importance of their roles. Yet, there is hope that women's roles in the church are being perceived in different ways. I see it in my pastor, a woman who is highly respected by all members of our congregation. I see it in my small group and other circles of friends, where men and women my age are talking about the hard issues of the church and women's voices are being heard, even though the audience is small. I see hope in my aunt's recent Master of Divinity degree, a major feat of struggle and challenge to fulfill her long-time dream. And, I see hope in the children of my church, whose first memories of the church of their youth will not be the struggle of women, but the importance and acceptance of everyone's gifts and talents, regardless of gender or race. My hope is that women will be given more glimmers of the life-giving recognition that we should be feeling in our roles in the church. ♦

Tina: I see the changes that the different generations have brought, but it is often not easy to see the changes without focusing on the hurts that the Church causes the women in my generation.

Reclaiming our lost legacies

The Black Church of today is much different than its original ancestor. To speak of the "Black Church" is to recognize its ecclesiastical, theological and denominational diversity. The Black Church is no longer exclusively defined as a traditional African denomination but also includes predominantly African American congregations in traditionally white denominations. So, to reflect on the role and struggle of the African American woman pastor, one must start with the progenitor and see how far we've come . . . or have strayed.

The creation of the Black Church is unique. Born from the enslaved Africans' experiences of slavery and oppression in the United States, the Black Church was the sanctuary for inspiration, theological development and individual, social and community justice action. For the most part, the 'churching' was informal and mobile. Another important characteristic of the early Black Church was the leadership. Men and women were encouraged to experience and express their gifting whether it was through exhorting, healing and/or praying. The Black Church was the place for receiving sustenance through

by Michelle Armster

Michelle Armster is a creative soul, weaving song and drama through all dimensions of her life. She has brought this creativity to the variety of places in which she has found herself along her life journey—from lead vocalist of Class Action, an adult contemporary band, to an insurance examiner in Dallas, Texas, to her current position as director of Mennonite Conciliation Service in Akron, Pennsylvania. A theatre graduate of Sterling College in Sterling, Kansas, Michelle entwines her flair for the dramatic with her passions for anti-racism work, peace and justice issues, and her faith journey.



Although I am grateful that God is a God of liberation, I am disheartened that there are churches that profess to follow Jesus, which continue to practice the slavery of racism and sexism.

messages of surviving the humiliation of slavery, enduring oppression and yearning for freedom.

However, after the Civil War, the Black Church sought to validate and legitimize its existence. Consequently, it embraced the institutional church model that was present at that time. Unfortunately, most White churches prophesed misogynistic doctrines and these were incorporated into the theology of the new institutionalized Black Church. However, the voices of the 'called' African American women could not be quieted. Jarena Lee and Amanda Berry Smith are just two of the many 19th century African American women preachers and evangelists who refused to bow to the oppressions of racism and sexism.

Although born free, Jarena Lee worked as a servant from the age of seven. At the age of 21, she became a Christian and began attending a white Methodist church. However, the racism

of the church quickly drove her to the African Methodist denomination. In her biography, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel*, Jarena Lee tells the story of her being called to preach and being rejected by the church. She responded by proclaiming, "If a man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one? As those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear." She continued to preach because she was certain of her call from the Higher authority. Seeing her effectiveness in bringing people to the church, Richard Allen, a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, licensed her to preach.

An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist is a powerful testimony to the life and calling of another 19th Century African American woman preacher, Amanda Berry Smith. Unlike Jarena Lee, Amanda Berry Smith was born into slavery. However, her father was able to purchase freedom for her mother, six children and himself. Like Jarena Lee, she faced and confronted the racism and sexism of her time. Also assured of her calling, Amanda Berry Smith traveled all over the United States, and to England, India and Africa as a preacher, evangelist and missionary. She was also a prominent figure in the founding of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, as well as the only orphanage for African American children in the state of Illinois.

These women were very clear that their ordination was from a higher, ultimate authority and would not be stifled by the bondage of doctrine. From these women, I have found my spiritual direction, inspiration, and courage.

As I begin to embrace God's calling in my life, I am equally aware of the barriers my chosen faith expression, the Mennonite Church, has erected. When I listen to my pastor's inspired sermons, I am conscious that the conference to which my church belongs refuses to accept her ordination based on her gender. Although I am grateful that God is a God of liberation, I am disheartened that there are churches that profess to follow Jesus, which continue to practice the slavery of racism and sexism.

Therefore, I pray that the Black Church, in fact, all of Christ's churches, claim and reclaim its lost legacy of . . . 'neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' ♦

You've Come a Long Way, Baby; or, Was the Anger Worth It?

I'm 41 and old enough to remember a time when women in leadership positions among the various Mennonite church groups were rare, actually unthinkable. In 1980 at the General Conference (GC) triennial conference, Marilyn Klaus, then a youth minister at Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton, Kansas, pulled me aside and told me it was time to make some history. A small group of women, upset at the male dominated nomination slate for GC Boards and Committees, resolved to act. A small notice in the conference *Word and World* newsletter announced that "Mennonite Feminists Meet Daily . . . in the Rustic Room coffee shop. . . . Interested feminists are welcome."¹ Meetings in the Rustic Room resulted in a plan to nominate women from the floor of the conference. One by one, Marilyn and her friends stood, unsure of their reception, they argued for the need to include women leaders and they nominated a slate of women! If memory serves me correctly, a man from Illinois stood with the women, he echoed their sentiments and concluded by nominating a black woman from his church. Our candidates were elected, and I received a valuable lesson in feminist principles and organizing.

Anger at established patriarchal customs spurred this overnight change in GC leadership. Since the meetings in the Rustic Room, women have gained top positions in churches, conferences, and at our institutions of higher learning. This change happened relatively fast, within one generation.

Have women arrived or is the anger, which resulted in the GC drama still necessary? My answer to this question is informed by United States women's history, some feminist theory and a lifelong involvement and commitment to the church.

It is true that a seismic shift in women's leadership has occurred.² Conference directories from both GCs and Mennonite Church (MC) show that over the past thirty years, women made many significant gains.³

In 1970, for example, the Allegheny Conference of the MC, with 40 congregations, had only one woman listed in a leadership position, Alva Yoder, a deacon. The Illinois conference, the Lancaster Conference, and the Franconia Conference, with combined totals of over 24,000 members in almost 290 congregations, had no women in leadership positions.

By 1980, the Allegheny conference listed Alva Yoder, again as a deacon, and Ruth Ann Yoder, a full-fledged minister. The Illinois conference seems to have been slightly more progressive than other MC conferences; by 1980 four women served as leaders among the conference's 37 churches. Codes indicate that these four women were either licensed or ordained ministers. One pastor, Emma Richards, went on to become president-elect of the conference, as listed in the 1990-91 Mennonite [MC] Yearbook.

By 1990, the Illinois Conference listed seven ordained or licensed women ministers among 46 churches. When compared to other MC Conferences, the Illinois Conference was a shining light of hope. The Lancaster conference had no women leaders listed in 1980. By 1990, however, six women broke through Lancaster Conference's glass ceiling and served among its 231 congregations. Again, some of these women were licensed and two were ordained ministers.

By 2001, the Allegheny Conference's 36 churches were served by five women.⁴ Similarly, the Franconia Conference had nine women serving in 48 churches. Again, one sees the Illinois Conference leading the way with 14 women serving in 45 congregations. By contrast, the Lancaster Conference employed 17 women among 210 congregations, most of whom served in secondary positions.

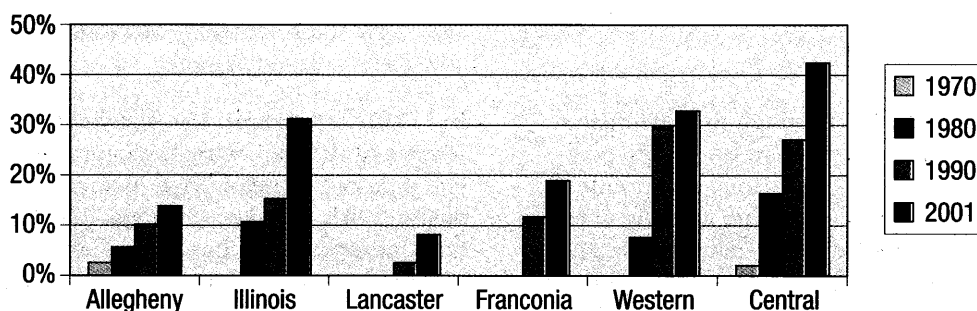
GC women fared a little better than MCs, but not by much, at least not early on. In 1970, only one woman was listed in the GC Central District, a contact person.

by Kimberly Schmidt

Kimberly D. Schmidt is an Assistant Professor of History and directs Eastern Mennonite University's Washington Community Scholars' Program in Washington, D.C. She would like to thank Dennis Stoesz and James Lynch, archivists at the Archives of the Mennonite Church USA at Goshen College and the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College, respectively, for providing research materials. Diane Zarr Brenneman, Cynthia Lapp, Melvin D. Schmidt, Andrea Lengacher, Johnna Schmidt and Pearl Hoover contributed in a number of ways to this article. Their insights informed Kimberly's thinking on this topic.

In 20 years women's status changed from serving primarily as contact persons or deacons to serving as co-pastors with husbands in the early 1980s, to serving as ordained ministers in their own right by the 1990s.

Percentage of Women Leaders



The Western District had no female representation listed in the 1970 directory. By 1980, however, five women were listed in the Western District's 66 churches and nine women leaders were listed among the Central District's 56 churches. By 1990, the numbers grew to 17 women serving the Western District's 57 churches and 19 women listed as leaders in the 70 churches of the Central District. The numbers continued to grow. By 2001, the directory listed 26 women serving 62 churches in the Central District and 24 women serving 73 churches in the Western District.⁵

Women quickly ascended the leadership ladder. In 20 years their status changed from serving primarily as contact persons or deacons to serving as co-pastors with husbands in the early 1980s, to serving as ordained ministers in their own right by the 1990s.

Is the church becoming feminized and therefore less desirable as a career choice? The percentages of women in leadership positions are growing. In the Western District, over 40% of the leadership positions are held by women, some of whom are lead pastors. In Mennonite Church USA, about 15% of ministers are women. This generational shift from rejecting to accepting women in the pulpit bears scrutiny. A lesson from United States women's history might be instructive. Perhaps female church leadership roles are less an indication of how far we've come and more of an indication of the church's lowered status in society. Perhaps men are abandoning the church, and, in so doing, leave the doors open for women. Church work might not be considered a worthy occupation for our

young men and so it is left to the women to pick up the pieces and shoulder on.

Mennonite seminaries are not keeping up with a demand for ministers. Diane Zarr Brenneman, with the Office of Ministerial Leadership, Mennonite Church USA, commented that the Church needs about 100 new pastors per year and that not nearly enough are graduating from seminary.⁶ In general there are about 135 openings for ministers on a month-to-month basis, and only 35 ministers available to fill those slots. Yet, it often takes recent female seminary graduates (fully 50% of most graduating classes) approximately six months longer than males to find full-time positions. Brenneman also noted how lead ministry positions are more elusive for women than for men.⁷

Although women have made spectacular gains, in some conferences women still face significant obstacles. It's possible that, given the hurdles women still face, women who choose the ministry must be far more intentional than many men. Young women from these conferences should learn early how to defend their life's calling. Pages from the "stories of" books that depict Mennonite women leaders serve as a guide.⁸ In these books, women often reiterate how they were called by God to serve, yet rejected by their home churches and conferences. It seems that in spite of the gains women have made, in spite of coming a long way, too many women are called by God, but not by the church. Interviews with two ordained women and a young woman on a path to the ministry make a clear case for some healthy feminist anger.⁹

The young woman, whom I interviewed last fall, feels a clear calling from God. Her pastoral gifts are obvious to anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear. A leadership team at a large urban church, which she served for seven months last year, warmly affirmed her initial forays into public servanthood. Ministers and others from this congregation encouraged her to continue classes at seminary and to follow her calling. Yet, though God calls her, the church has not. In fact, she feels that her home conference will most likely oppose her ministry. She was dismayed by negative reactions from her extended family after she preached for the first time last summer. It bears noting that the church she served last year is an ecumenical church with loose ties to a Mennonite conference.

The two other women, nearer to my age, faced obstacles as well. One woman's sisters refused to attend her ordination service, believing that it was sinful for her to preach from the pulpit. The other woman survived a bruising licensing battle with the help of an all-male team that demanded her licensing and ordination proceed over the objections of high ranking conference officials.

So have we come a long way? Yes and no. Ordination struggles in several conferences should encourage feminists to own their anger, and to use it for constructive change. I well remember the nervousness that accompanied Marilyn Klaus' quest for more female leadership. Nervousness, however, was soon replaced by relief and a giddy triumphal feeling when conference delegates voted in favor of our candidates. This brief historical overview has highlighted how change occurred both overnight and over 30 years. Owning anger, admittedly a challenge for many of us, and using it constructively to overcome gender oppression in the church, can and has fostered change. ♦

Notes

1. *Word and World*, General Conference Mennonite Church, Estes Park, CO (July 17, 1980) 5.

2. In this article, "leadership" is broadly defined. All women listed in the directories were included regardless of their status as pastors, copastors, members of a pastoral team, music coordinators, youth ministers or contact persons, etc.

3. Information on women's leaders was gleaned from the Mennonite Church Yearbooks and General Conference Handbooks, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2001. For GC material contact Faith and Life Press, North Newton, Kansas. For MC contact Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania. Yearbooks and Handbooks, referred to as "directories" in the article are also available at the Mennonite Library and Archives in North Newton, Kansas and the Archives of the Mennonite Church, USA in Goshen, Indiana. This short study is far from conclusive. I did not attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis in these few short paragraphs. Rather, I offer a summary of selected sources and some thoughts about the trends indicated in these sources.

4. The Mennonite Directory, 2001, p. 48-50 only lists four women. I added one because of additional information not found in the directory. Cynthia Lapp remains on the Hyattsville Mennonite Church's pastoral staff, a position she has held since 1995. Evidently, the MC church did not list those not ordained even though many non-ordained persons served the church. This discrepancy raises the issue of accurate data.

5. I chose to focus on just a few conferences or districts within each larger Mennonite church body, GC and MC. My choices were somewhat random. The GC side is represented by the Central District and the Western District. My father was a minister at churches in these districts and I am somewhat familiar with the terrain in those areas. The MC church, was represented by the Allegheny, Franconia, Illinois, and Lancaster Conferences. My current church membership is with an Allegheny church. Some conferences were chosen because of connections with my informants, other conference selections were made simply out of curiosity.

6. These statistics were compiled by Diane Zarr Brenneman. During our interview she noted how data collection efforts could easily skew statistics. Currently ministers register their information on a voluntary basis. Their information forms the data for Brenneman's statistics. Ministers are encouraged to register online at www.mennodata.org or contact debr@mennoniteusa.org

7. Interview with Diane Zarr Brenneman, February 11, 2003.

8. See Mary Lou Cummings, *Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women*. (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1978); Ruth Unrau, *Encircled: Stories of Mennonite Women* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1986); and Louise Stoltzfus, *Quiet Shouts: Stories of Lancaster Mennonite Women Leaders* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1999).

9. At the request of two of my informants, all three shall remain anonymous.

Owning anger, admittedly a challenge for many of us, and using it constructively to overcome gender oppression in the church, can and has fostered change.

Where's the MJ?

by Megan Scott

Megan Scott attends Circle of Hope BIC Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she recently assumed the role of Director of Circle Venture, the church's arm of compassionate service in the city.

Academically, there has also been recognition that God's attributes are not solely representative of a Father, but also of a Mother, a Creator.



Where's the MJ?" a young girl whispers to her grandma. Observing the worship service at her grandmother's church, she is perplexed. Everything seemed like her home congregation, rows of wooden pews, a large pulpit, people dressed in their Sunday best. There was just one thing missing.

She was waiting for a woman to address the congregation—a woman who would fill my mother's role (MJ, or Mary Jane Davis). Like me, this girl grew up assuming women had a natural place in the church. Though I had witnessed my mother's struggle to prove her call, I had not fully realized that she was a pioneer in the Brethren in Christ (BIC) church—one of the first paid women in ministry, one of the first to be ordained by the denomination, and one of the only to serve as associate bishop. Seeing MJ in front of the congregation modeled to this young girl that preaching and praying were valid roles for women in the church.

I am indebted to her as well as many other women I have encountered as I have made my journey toward ministry in the BIC church. Encouraged by a woman in my home congregation, I chose to study theology at Messiah College. With no trepidation based on my gender and with great encouragement from my mother, I recently accepted my first pastoral role as the director of my current church's compassionate services ministries.

My experience with the BIC church has kept me in pockets of the church where women are given room to thrive. I will write of how these pockets have reached this point, of how women's voices have created

new elements of formal ministry in the church in the past 25 years and of the hope I possess that the entire denomination will actively embrace women in ministry in the 25 years to come.

First, what has occurred to give women this opportunity? How have women moved from behind the scenes roles of Sunday School teachers and missionaries into primary roles as senior and associate pastors? Several factors contributed to this change. The growth of churches and the increase in staff size made it possible for women to take on associate roles in familiar territory, as Pastor of Children's Ministries, or Minister of Christian Education. The precursor of this in secular society is the equality of women in the workplace that allowed all to see such potential in the church. The choice of more women to attend college and graduate work, gave them the credentials necessary for licensing and ordination.

As women's studies have expanded, new theological perspectives have been unveiled. It is now recognized that women do receive a call to minister and preach in the church. Academically, there has also been recognition that God's attributes are not solely representative of a Father, but also of a Mother, a Creator. With this realization, it becomes clear that the church needs to be mothered just as it is fathered. While these roles do not need to be fulfilled by one gender or another, women often fulfill the traditional roles of mother more naturally. They do this by offering their emotional savvy and intuition, by basing their ministry on relationship building, by being available to talk and counsel, and so when given an opportunity to preach they speak from the heart.

It is through this focus on relationships that women have impacted ministry in the church. Alice Grace Hostetter Zercher in *Celebrating Women's Stories*, a collection of influential BIC women's biographies, states, "The fabric of a woman's life seems to revolve more often around relationships and these are much more intricate than the hard factual approach expected of

men. . . There is no beginning at the bottom and rising to the top, for relationships involve prime consideration of someone else's good."

How have women's voices created new elements of formal ministry in the BIC denomination? From coffee shop ministries to church-sponsored counseling programs, from vibrant children's outreach to more intentional pastoral care, women have altered ministry protocol.

Yet the process is slow. Twenty years since the BIC church officially sanctioned the licensing and ordination of women at their General Conference meeting in 1982, 11 have been ordained and 20 hold current ministerial licenses. Others serve while in the process of completing their credentials.

The denomination, however, is becoming more intentional in its encouragement of

women in ministry. New denominational leadership has brought forward men eager to encourage emerging women leaders. Kenneth Hoke, General Secretary of the BIC Church, attended the 5th Annual Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy Conference in 2002 where BIC women preached and led. Bishop Ken Letner of the Susquehanna Conference envisions a Leadership Development Team chaired by a woman with the intention of encouraging young women and men alike to consider ministry.

More children are growing up with MJ's, mothers of the church whom they expect to see on Sunday mornings. More young adults do not question the authority of a woman to lead their congregations. More women are answering God's call to serve. And more churches are not only permitting but expecting women to step forward in leadership roles. ♦

More children are growing up with MJ's, mothers of the church whom they expect to see on Sunday mornings.

One way bridge?

More than sixty years ago Virginia Woolf invited women to stand on the bridge connecting two worlds: private and public, home and professions, women's and men's. She invited women to fix their eyes upon the procession, the procession of sons and of educated men. Considering the fact that currently in many universities about half of the undergraduates are female, we can safely say that women have joined the procession of educated men across the bridge.

Woolf did challenge women to consider where the procession was leading them. One of the pertinent concerns for Woolf in 1938 was the prevention of war. Looking at the procession of educated men who were marching toward World War II, Woolf believed that women could best help prevent war not by repeating the words (of educated men) and following the same methods but by affirming the rights of all through new words and new methods.

Many of us have walked across that bridge and joined the ranks of educated men.

What strikes me in this metaphor of the bridge as used by Woolf is the fact that the procession is going one way. If the bridge is connecting private life (domain of women) and public life (domain of men), why is the procession going only one way? If women leave the private domain to join men in the public domain, is it because what society values most is to be found in public life? Women who entered academic fields found quickly that they were outsiders in the sense that they had to learn to think, speak and act like the educated men who were at home there. In order to be successful in the public domain, women were asked to assimilate into the culture they chose to join, to adopt the values of the public domain.

In the past our society has considered higher education as a way of assimilation of cultures, where an individual or a group replaced its original culture and values with new ones. Only recently have we in Canada acknowledged that schools for the aboriginal people required of their

by Mary Friesen

Mary Friesen is currently working with MCC Canada as Coordinator of Programs with Low German Mennonites in the Americas. She was formerly a Vice Principal at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She recently completed a Doctor of Ministry degree at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, Alberta. Mary and her husband, Gerhard, are members at River East Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg. They have two children and three grandchildren (and one more arriving in July). This article first appeared in the Summer 2001 issue of *Sophia*.

Have we considered the fact that our society continues to put low value on the work being done in the private realm?

students to give up their own culture and accept the values imbedded in the educational curriculum imposed on them. Has the education system attempted to assimilate women into embracing the public domain of men?

Our society values education and encourages young people (girls and boys) to acquire this valued commodity. Have we considered the fact that our society continues to put low value on the work being done in the private realm? We still have not created new methods that would provide social benefits like pension plans or employment insurance for parents who choose to work at home while taking care of their children or aging parents. Just because women have opportunities in higher education and some career choices they did not have sixty years ago, this does not mean their experiences and ideas have equal value in design of curricula or public policies.

When we take a closer look at the content and structure of curricula in secondary and post-secondary schools, we find that the values of competition, academic achievement, abstract thinking and power are deeply imbedded in them. Those are the values of the public domain as described by Woolf sixty years ago.

Most of us want our children, both girls and boys, to become caring adults who maintain meaningful relationships with others and become responsible citizens of our society. One way to accomplish this is to integrate caring, connectedness, compassion and spirituality (values traditionally embedded in the private domain) into the academic curricula for all our children.

While women should have equal opportunity to work in areas that have traditionally been the domain of men, they should not do so simply because those occupa-

tions are valued more highly than the work that has traditionally been done by women. Caring for children, the aged and the ill must be shared by all capable adults. Our children, boys and girls, need to experience care to learn how to care for others and to establish meaningful relationships. We can encourage girls to consider studying mathematics and science or to choose professions that have in the past been dominated by men, but we can also encourage boys to choose careers as care-givers and to enter into professions that allow them to care for children, the elderly and the lonely.

Since women have joined the procession across the bridge into the public realm, society has created institutions for child-care, for the elderly and for the disabled, yet most of these care-giving activities are as devalued in their new location as they were when they belonged exclusively to the world of the private home. The procession across the bridge needs to go both ways, and honest work in both domains must be respected and valued equally.

If we are going to measure the gains that women have made, our society must also address the need to create a system that will value care, concern, compassion and connectedness as highly as academic achievement and competition. What is needed is not one or the other but integration of both for the benefit of all. When all our children, boys and girls, are offered equal educational opportunities in a system where caring for others is a valued priority, we will begin to serve the needs of all. I don't see this primarily as an issue for women in their struggle towards equality; rather, it is an essential step toward finding new words and creating new methods that will prevent war and any other form of violence. ♦

A Call to Write History

Two years ago I took a course in global Mennonite history at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. In the first class we were given a two-page bibliography that I quickly scanned for women's names. To my dismay, there were none. Then I began doing the required reading carefully checking the footnotes and bibliographies searching for women's names. Again, very few were found. This was very troubling because I knew women who had contributed to Anabaptist/Mennonite history. The question was, why were none of their publications on this list, and why were they not cited in the books we were reading?

One of the course requirements was to do a major paper. As a way of trying to find an answer to my question, I researched the "Contributions of Women to the Study of Global Anabaptist History." I found that when women write history, they include the perspectives of women, citations from women and the influence of women.

Indeed, since 1950, women have written histories of congregations, missions, geographic areas, MCC programs, colleges, and leaders—sometimes even of their fathers. I compiled a list of 14 pages of book titles on this subject. But only a few women have contributed to a comprehensive interpretation of Mennonite Church history. Canadian women appear to be doing more than women in the United States.

Marlin Adrian, a professor of church history, in his study of women martyrs, says that when women are ignored in history, we are all shortchanged because new metaphors, new insights and new understandings on life experiences grow out of seeing history through the experiences of women along with the experiences of men. Marlin found that one woman martyr spoke of her impending martyrdom, not as a journey to death, but rather the one and only true path to life eternal. This narrow way that leads to life is a birth canal through which she must pass in order to end one existence and begin another. This image offers hope and life.¹

I found very few articles or books by women about Anabaptist history published prior to 1950. One woman who contributed a great deal to Anabaptist history was Elizabeth Horsch Bender, 1895–1988. John S. Oyer, a former editor of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (MQR), wrote that "For almost fifty years, she did all of the translation work, eighty percent of the copyediting, much of the proofreading (she proofread each issue), and also much correcting of factual and interpretive errors of (the *Mennonite Quarterly Review's*) authors" (MQR, July, 1986, p. 229). However, it was not until 1968 that Bender's name appeared on the masthead of MQR as an office editor. Mary Ellen Meyer wrote that Bender translated from German the two volumes already published of the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, which was the foundation for *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vols. I–IV. Even though Bender went over every article, her name was not included in the list of editors in the first edition. She was not troubled by this because she said that very few people ever look at the list of editors (MQR, July, 1986, p. 242).

In a 1980 study, John Gingerich and Suzanne Gross found that in the late 1800s, much of the material in *Herald of Truth*, later *Gospel Herald*, was contributed by women—more than half in some issues.² Clara Brubaker Shank's, 1869–1958, life spanned the 19th–20th centuries. By the time she was 26 years old (1895), she had published 42 articles in the *Herald of Truth*. After 1912 she wrote only 10 articles for church papers. She married in 1925 when she was 55 years old. From there on she wrote only two articles. It appears that both fundamentalism and marriage impacted her writing (Stuckey-Kauffman, MQR, 1986, pp. 422–423).

The biggest barrier to overcome was the impact of fundamentalism that silenced women, at least in the Mennonite Church, in the early part of the twentieth century. Some women have begun to study history. Some are archivists and a few have pub-

by Mary Swartley

Mary has been a high school and college business teacher, as well as an educational and congregational administrator. She and her husband Willard have a son, a daughter and six grandchildren. Mary co-edited, with Rhoda Keener, the book, *She Has Done A Good Thing*, Herald Press, 1999. She has studied at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, serves on Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Executive Committee, and has begun to write her own memoirs.

I found that when women write history, they include the perspectives of women, citations from women and the influence of women.



Women's experiences need to be included in comprehensive church histories to give us an interpretation of history that is more honest.

lished. Three books in the Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History Series were written by women: Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements*, 1987; Hope Kauffman Lind, *Apart and Together: Mennonites in Oregon and Neighboring States, 1876–1976*, 1990; and Melanie Springer Mock, *Writing Peace: The Unheard Voices of Great War Mennonite Objectors*, 2003. This series published by Herald Press began in 1929. Lois Barrett has also contributed much in interpreting history of Mennonite missions through her book, *The Vision and The Reality*, Faith & Life Press, 1983. A 2002 publication in the C. Henry Smith Series, by Pandora Press and co-published by Herald Press, is an interpretive history volume written by Julia Kasdorf that is entitled *Fixing Tradition, Joseph W. Yoder, Amish American*. Most of us recognize Julia Kasdorf as a poet, or an associate professor of English. She also interprets history.

Some of us need to be courageous and interested enough to give time and energy to study the many diaries of Anabaptist women, interview women, and study these smaller congregational and conference histories. We need to know how women experienced church splits, excommunications, or spiritual revivals. Their experiences need to be included in comprehensive church histories to give us an interpretation of history that is more honest.

Recently I studied a dozen women in Indiana and Michigan who made outstanding contributions to their congregations. One of the women I studied was Emma Habig Culp, 1890–1968, a woman unknown to most of us. Her husband was a pastor, church planter and evangelist. Her daughters say that Emma was well known in their hometown of Chief, Michigan, as a pastoral care giver from 1919–1953. When anyone in the village was sick, they called for Emma to come and pray for them. When there was a death, the family came to Emma for help in planning the funeral. She not only planned the service, but also arranged for meals for the family. Since her husband traveled often for evangelistic meetings, she also managed the farm. Her daughters say she was an excellent manager, delegating and involving the community in the work.

Culp and the other women are an important part of the history of the Mennonite Church in Indiana and Michigan. These along with many other stories of faithful Mennonite Church women need to be incorporated into a revision of an already existing history by John C. Wenger, *The Mennonites in Indiana and Michigan*, Herald Press, 1961. Yes, it is writing women back into history.

I'm convinced that until women are part of the research teams; only tokens of our experiences will be included in the printed Anabaptist and Mennonite Church histories. Since women are not included in our conference histories, and denominational histories, these histories need to be revised to include the work of women. It is a major project but a very important one. Certainly women need to be equal partners for any future history writing projects that are planned. As we retell our history with new metaphors and new insights, we will reinterpret our history and reinterpret the identity of our people. ♦

Notes

1. Adrian, Marlin, "The Women of the Martyrs' Mirror: Paradigms In Anabaptist/Mennonite Mythology," *Mennonite Life*, Je 1997.
2. Rich, Elaine Sommers, *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness*, pp. 226, 244.

BOOK REVIEW

Celebrating Women's Stories: Faith Through Life's Seasons

Celebrating Women's Stories: Faith Through Life's Seasons. Edited by Rebecca L. Ebersole, Dorcas I. Steckbeck, E. Morris Sider. Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 2002. Paper, 336 pages.

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the duke asks Viola about Olivia, whom he wants to marry: "And what's her history?" Viola replies, "A blank, my lord." There is no information about her. Like Olivia's past, churchwomen's history has often been a blank. Though always present in the life of the church, their history has often been unrecorded.

This groundbreaking book makes visible 21 Brethren in Christ (BIC) women who have not been significantly profiled before. They include the living and the dead, the bold and the reticent, the single, widowed and married, some with large families. Some were born into the BIC church; others chose it as their spiritual home.

The women come from a variety of family backgrounds. Many grew up in homes with parents who were missionaries or in church ministries. The ethnicity of these women include Navajo, African-American, and Cuban Hispanic, as well as those of European heritage.

As the biographies explore the faith journeys and family life of each woman, immediately apparent is the passion for a specific cause that emerged early in life and resulted in wide-ranging ministries. These women became missionaries, educators, administrators, pastors, businesswomen, evangelists, church planters, and medical workers at a time when these avenues of service were not open to them. Yet this is not a book with a feminist agenda, but an attempt to show the road some BIC women took to find their calling.

"Their lives teach theology in an anecdotal way," states the Introduction. There are passing references to the church's

emphasis on holiness and sanctification, to Bible conferences, separatist tendencies (even from other Mennonite groups), and use of musical instruments.

More importantly, the biographies reveal that God is a God of change. Some of the women maintained gender boundaries, others moved outside them. If the stories had been in chronological order rather than alphabetical, the gradual shifts in theology and church practice might have been easier for the reader to discern. Early women wore head coverings and conservative dress. They did not vote in congregational meetings and served as the opportunity presented itself. A few women deliberately decided against the prayer covering, becoming aggressive change agents. Sometimes the biographies are almost intimidating, as the women add ministry to ministry to their work load as if to make up for decades of lost time.

When these women looked for ministry, they were seeking a ministry that suited their gifts rather than position and power. Several became influential leaders in breaking gender stereotypes. Lillian Frey Lehman became a prominent businesswoman. Like cream that always rises to the top, Nancy Heisey moved through the ranks of MCC administration to become president-elect of Mennonite World Conference. Some women, like Janet Marie Witmer Peifer, lived with the dream of becoming a pastor for decades, before the church was ready to receive women pastors. The Hoffman sisters (Clara and Mary) are depicted as tireless, methodical workers. Together they gave 79 years of devoted service to Messiah College, often at the expense of personal fulfillment.

This book joins other anthologies of stories about Anabaptist women: *Quiet Shouts: Stories of Lancaster Mennonite Women Leaders* (1999) by Louise Stoltzfus; *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's*

by Katie Funk Wiebe

Katie Funk Wiebe is professor emerita of Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas. This review will appear in the August 2003 issue of the *Brethren in Christ History and Life Journal* and is printed by permission.

Faithfulness 1683–1983 (1983) by Elaine Sommers Rich; *Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women* (1978), edited by Mary Lou Cummings; and *Women Among the Brethren: Stories of Fifteen Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Women* (1979), edited by Katie Funk Wiebe.

The writers, editors and sponsors of this book make an important contribution to church history and readers by changing the “blank” in the history books to meaningful content. I commend the editors for the even style of writing and the writers for their thorough research. ♦

LETTERS

Editor's note: The goal of this column is to offer a place for our readers to respond to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in *Report*. Although we try to print all letters, they may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, but writers may request to have their names withheld.

To the Editor:

I FOUND THE ISSUE of *Women's Concerns Report* on abuse prevention and recovery to be very timely and relevant. However, I wonder that nothing was said in the articles about Elder Abuse, psychological or physical. This problem is becoming more prevalent all the time both in residences for senior citizens and in private homes. It's a serious problem particularly as seniors are often reluctant to speak out about it when it has happened to them. In that sense, it could be compared to abuse of women and children in the past when they also were afraid to speak out and look for support.

Barbara Cook
Waterloo, Ontario

To the Editor:

LINDA SCHMIDT USED THE TERM “benevolent patriarchy” in her article in the January–February 2003 *Women's Concerns Report*. A good example of benevolent patriarchy is found in John Adam's response to his wife, Abigail, who felt that “all men would be tyrants if they could.” His letter can be found in *From This Day Forward*, Cokie and Steve Roberts (Wm. Morrow and Co., 2000).

Donald Kaufman
Newton, Kansas

To the Editor:

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING US to hear the voices of former MCC Women's Concerns directors, January–February 2003; we appreciate the candor with which they wrote.

Thank you also for the memorial piece to Louise Stoltzfus. The Appalachian proverb, “A tall woman casts a long shadow,” expresses her legacy to those of us who knew and loved her. She still touches our lives today with her writings. We were privileged to call her sister and friend. We miss her voice.

Ruth S. Weaver
Sharon Kraybill
Donna Mack Shenk
Marilyn Kennel
Joanne Dietzel

Mary Yunginger Rittenhouse
Elizabeth G. Nissley
Sue Aeschliman Groff
Eve MacMaster

Women in church leadership

Stephanie Bartsch, along with her husband Mark, has accepted a pastoral assignment at Toledo Mennonite Church in Toledo, Ohio.

Karen Brown, along with Andrew Suderman, have been appointed youth pastors at Faith Mennonite Church and North Leamington United Mennonite Church, both in Leamington, Ontario.

Ruth Johnston will serve as Intentional Interim Pastor at Agape Fellowship in Dorchester, Ontario.

Claire Osinkosky has been appointed pastor at Preston Mennonite Church in Cambridge, Ontario.

Jeanne Rempel has been licensed to serve as pastor at Evergreen Mennonite Church in Bellevue, Washington.

Working for women in South America. “I will never forget what happened yesterday,” said one of the participants in the 11th Southern Cone Mennonite/Anabaptist Congress, held at the Kairós Community Center in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, February 20–23, 2003. She was referring to a moment when contrite men stood up to express their regret for suffering inflicted upon women. Directly or by silent complicity, the men had discriminated against women in their churches. The women responded by standing to express their forgiveness. In a study session focussing on women and Anabaptism, a most healing thing happened. Several women shared their hurts regarding restrictions in using their ministerial gifts in church, and men responded with deep sorrow and a desire to revert that situation. The Findings Committee picked up on this episode and recommended that men ask to be forgiven, and that steps be taken to correct this practice in Anabaptist churches. Southern Cone countries take turns hosting these biennial gatherings. Twenty-three years ago the first meeting was held in Argentina. The next one will take place in Brazil in 2005. Some themes suggested were: the role of women, hierarchy in the church, spirituality, and global missions. —*Mennonite World Conference News Release, March 13, 2003.*

Mennonite Brethren Church in Manitoba calls for women pastors. “We call our people in the Spirit of Christ to relate to one another in mutual respect as sisters and brothers in Christ,” stated a resolution passed by 79% of Manitoba delegates at a March meeting. This resolution was passed on to the Canadian Conference Board of Faith and Life for review and discussion. It calls for the church “to be increasingly alert to the gifts of women and men and to become more active in calling and blessing them to minister in all areas of church life.” Currently, the Mennonite Brethren church does not recognize women in lead pastoral positions. —*“Manitoba MBs call for women pastors,” Mennonite Weekly Review, May 5, 2003.*

Where are Iraq's women? The United States was hoping to set up an interim administration in Iraq by the end of the May, and the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told the BBC that the interim government would be representative of the population of Iraq. Elisabeth Rehn, an author of an extensive report for the United Nations, Women, War and Peace, has been shocked at the lack of women in the process. “There has been so much talk about how to reflect the diversity of Iraqi society—the Shia, Sunnis and Kurds—but what about the women? Some 55% of the population is forgotten,” she lamented. In a Middle Eastern country where women played an active role in the government until the bombs started dropping, this is indeed a disappointing turn around. Iraqi women are among the best educated in the Middle East and have always held a large proportion of professional positions. Both the United States and United Kingdom governments have said they are committed to getting more women involved. We’ll keep our eyes and ears open to see if this happens. —*Kathryn Westcott, “Where are Iraq's women?,” BBC News Online, May 8, 2003.*

Women's Inter-Church Council (WICC) of Canada celebrated their 85th Anniversary with a reception and book launch May 31. WICC is committed to encouraging women to grow in ecumenism; to share their spirituality and prayer; to respond to national and international issues affecting women; and to take action together for justice. The Mennonite representative is Eleanor Epp-Stobbe, from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Eleanor is also the Voices for Non-Violence Coordinator with MCC Manitoba. The book launch honored *Some Women Amazed Us: Biblical Studies from a Christian Feminist Perspective* written by Bernice Santor. In *Some Women Amazed Us*, Bernice Santor





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focuses on 12 biblical women, including Eve, Abigail, Huldah, Esther, Ruth, Mary; the mother of Jesus, Martha, and Prisca. Each study includes an exegesis through literary form, historical context, application for today, creative activities and a closing ritual. For more information on WICC, visit <http://www.wicc.org>.

Women Fast for Peace. MCC Canada invited women to give up food in some form each Wednesday beginning January 22 through April 16. Esther Epp-Tiessen, MCC Canada's Peace Ministries Program Coordinator, said, "We hope that the fast (was) a spiritual experience for the participants . . . I hope the experience of fasting will give women a sense of hope and empowerment as they fast with others." The women's fast was intended to draw attention to the fact that women have an important role to play in building a culture of peace in our world, but too often they are excluded from positions of power where decisions for war or peace are

made. Too often, wars are planned and carried out primarily by men, yet women often bear the brunt of the suffering that wars unleash. Women speaking and acting collectively as women can have a powerful impact on public life. Visit the Web site <http://www.mcc.org/canada/peace> for more information. —MCC Canada News, January 20, 2003.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT

Looking Forward

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 2003

Theological grounding
for gender equality



NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2003

Looking forward



JANUARY–FEBRUARY 2004

Gifts of the Red Tent;
Women Creating